title, the portrait on the front cover, and the bust on the frontispiece indicate that this is a biography. Though the author assures us on page one that "this is not a biography," Francis Smith triumphs as its hero, if not its subject. Moreover, this is a biography. Though the author title, the portrait on the front cover, and the bust on the frontispiece indicate that this is a biography. Though the author assures us on page one that "this is not a biography," Francis Smith triumphs as its hero, if not its subject. Moreover, thorough research and occasionally stellar analysis have resulted in, oddly enough, patchy content, while the extravagant number of illustrations, length of text, and density of material are outmatched by the catalogue raisonné in the appendix. The appendix also contains archival evidence for the business of building but lacks two critical pieces of information: a family tree and a detailed chronology.

Neither the thematic arrangement of the volume as a whole nor the alphabetical listing of the catalogue reveals a clear chronology or an easily comprehensible evolution. Although the text emphasizes the second Francis Smith as its subject, the table of contents, and therefore the structure of the book, focuses on the buildings. The chapters broaden in scope and narrative in style are the best: the first one deals with craftsmen-architects and is useful to any architectural historian; the second describes the Smith family members and their professional affiliations, revealing credible reputations for honesty and economy, as well as burgeoning affluence; the third traces stylistic influences, with a particularly engaging section titled “With and Without Pattern Books”; and the ninth surveys the Smith's rebuilding of Warwick after the disastrous fire of 1694. The remaining eight chapters, however fascinating, are fragmentary, loosely structured, often heavy on description and light on analysis. They range in scope from the specific, like chapter five, “Square Tops and Orders,” to the vague, as in chapter seven, “Country Houses: Planning and Craftsmanship.” The chapter “The Gentry House and the Plain Style” and a section called “Plain Houses of the Lesser Gentry” work the same ground, although in a project of this scale such redundancies are excusable. The greatest disappointment, however, is that chapter eight, containing six excellent case studies, provides little analysis to link these particular buildings and no criteria for their selection. Its discussion would benefit from an introduction and conclusion. The successful chapters share one characteristic—a clue perhaps to what is lacking in the rest: the builders are primary and their buildings secondary. These parts of the book balance social and architectural history, presenting a more vivid picture of the cultural conditions, the clientele, the building profession, and the hero. In the chapters that are architecturally based, however, description of individual structures (mostly domestic) dominates, with weaker contextual references.

That said, Gomme has an impressive ability to read façades carefully for original dates and elements, alterations and enlargements, signature styles, possible correlations, probable attributions, and so on. His descriptive passages expand on the Buildings of England tradition, shedding light on a full range of projects, modest to pretentious, domestic to ecclesiastical, exterior and interior, with equal aplomb and great dexterity. Collectively, the Smiths' oeuvre illustrates the final wave of buildings in England designed by craftsmen-architects. Francis and both Williams were among the last to construct their own designs. By the nineteenth century, the profession had split. Although Francis Smith joined the two endeavors in a single career, Gomme convincingly argues that his abilities were unequal: “as a builder Smith, even if not quite in a class of his own, had in his time no superior in England” and “as an architect he was equally clearly not in the first rank” (500). While lacking genius, Smith had a distinguished and prosperous career, spreading his talents throughout a large geographical area and influencing others even farther afield. He may not have been a “Hawksmoor, an Archer or even a Wood” (500), but that makes him no less worthy of a biography. He was no “metropolitan spearhead” (265), yet he developed a “grapevine of contented customers” (45) within the rather conservative gentry. He ran his business with acumen, honesty, economy, and dedication, and hired the most skilled individuals to provide “superlative decorative craftsmanship” (274). He designed consistently enough that 250 years later one can argue an attribution, but not so predictably that his signature is ever obvious.

Gomme has managed to piece together a tantalizing story of social and architectural history regarding a lesser breed of designer and clientele than that to which most historians are accustomed. This vantage point provides insight into the more mainstream life of building in the eighteenth century and begins to address the shifting tides that caused the demise of the builder-architect and the rise of the architect. Gomme comes so close to producing a biography that this reader wishes he had taken the risk, for the end of the hero’s story coincides with the conclusion of a significant building tradition in England. This book—glamorous in size, illustrations, and cost—bears no resemblance to the more modest subject within, except that its details, like those by Francis Smith, are arresting.

Jeffrey W. Cody


The American architect Henry K. Murphy (1877–1954) is largely unknown among historians of American architecture. Yet no serious historian would deny his significance, given the prominence of his work abroad and the importance of some of his American employees. He was the planner and architect of several important Chinese universities, including Tsinghua and Beijing (originally Yenching), the two leading schools in...
Henry K. Murphy, perspective view of Yenching University, Beijing, ca. 1926

Jeffrey Cody has done a great service by his careful reconstruction of Murphy's life and career in Building in China: Henry K. Murphy's "Adaptive Architecture," 1914-1935. An 1899 graduate of Yale University, Murphy began practicing in Connecticut with his partner, Richard Henry Dana, Jr., specializing in houses in various revival styles. The year 1914 was the watershed of his career. Yale connections and the acclaim he won for his 1913 design of the Loomis Institute in Windsor, Connecticut, brought him the commission for a campus plan and buildings for Yale-in-China, a project that inaugurated not only Murphy's career in Asia but also his search for what he called an "adaptive architecture," meaning an architecture fusing Chinese palace traditions with Western technology. Commissions for two more Western-style campuses, St. Paul's College in Tokyo and Qinghua (Tsinghua) College, followed his fruitful work for Yale. Over the next half decade, Murphy's business prospered, especially in Asia. With additional commissions from missionary organizations and the International Banking Corporation, he opened the Shanghai branch office of Murphy & Dana in 1918. But, as Cody explains, his most significant success was probably that he defeated his rival, the Canadian architect Harry Hussey, who had designed Peking Union Medical College in the Chinese style. By 1918, Murphy had established himself as the major architect for the pragmatic adaptation of Chinese architectural prototypes for modern use.

Ginling College for Girls in Nanjing (1918-23) was the first work that fully embodied Murphy's ideal of adaptive architecture, preparing for his masterpiece in this genre, Yenching University (1919-26). Despite the architect's considerable difficulties handling relations with clients, budget, and construction, apparently caused by the period of office instability that accompanied the dissolution of his partnership with Dana and then of the short-lived arrangement he had in 1921-23 with Hamlin and Henry McGill, Ginling College was well received. Cody reports that the commissioner of public works of the local province called it the first successful modernization of Chinese architecture by a foreigner (152). Murphy became so confident that he believed his Yenching University campus would become "a close second to the Forbidden City" (161).

Murphy's success led to work in the broader realm of Chinese urban modernization. As early as 1923, Sun Ke (Sun Fo), son of Sun Yat-sen and the mayor of Guangzhou, invited Murphy to create an urban plan to update the city. Although the project Sun Ke approved in 1927 went largely unimplemented, the big Chinese-style civic center Murphy proposed was realized by the Chinese architect Lin Keming in the mid-1930s. In 1927, Murphy became the chief architectural adviser to the Nationalist Government for updating the plan of Nanjing, the city it had newly selected as its capital. In addition to a Chinese-style government center reminiscent of Guangzhou's but much larger, the part of Murphy's proposal that deserves particular notice was his retention of historical monuments as the departure point for a new urban design. Countering those who advocated demolishing the city wall to ease traffic circulation, he insisted that "the battered old gray city wall should be maintained at all costs" (184). Sharing that ideal, the distinguished Chinese architectural historian Liang Sicheng proposed a similar policy toward Beijing's city wall in the 1950s. Unlike Beijing's wall, which was eventually torn down, most of Nanjing's has survived.

The key word Cody uses throughout his study is "adaptive." As he shows us, Murphy was smitten by his first visit to the Forbidden City in 1914 and was convinced that Chinese architecture deserved to be considered on an equal footing with that of the West. This notion drove him not only to strike compromises in his own work between...
Western technologies and Chinese stylistic features but also to urge his Chinese colleagues to do likewise. Meanwhile, his adaptive architecture paralleled the goal of the “indigenous church movement” launched by missionaries in 1923–24, which sought to develop a native Christian art and architecture.

Cody shows that Murphy’s success with his hybrid style was due partly to his personality. He was “deft at solving ‘bricks and mortar’ architectural questions” (41) and “demonstrated considerable personal skills . . . expediency, deference, a down-to-earth attitude, an attention to detail, confidence, energy, resourcefulness and variability” (51). Those characteristics enabled him to win client after client, from Connecticut to Asia, from Western missionaries and businesses to the Chinese government. Cody argues that his rival Hussey failed because his “commitment to understanding Chinese architecture, unlike Murphy’s, was not matched by an understanding of how to please the client and manage the building site” (85).

Building in China is part of a small but growing literature on twentieth-century Western architects who practiced in non-Western contexts, and it is the first monograph on one of the American architects who practiced in early-twentieth-century China. Based on careful research on Murphy’s commissions and working relationships, Cody convincingly argues that the architect collaborated with his clients to create a twentieth-century Chinese-style architecture and, through his wide connections with Chinese architects and politicians, initiated a proliferation of such buildings as new political emblems. This book makes a major contribution to knowledge of a complex area long overlooked in canonical modern architectural history defined through the development of architecture in the West.

Cody’s extensive archival research and interviews with the many people who knew Murphy, both in the United States and China, is invaluable, especially considering that modern Chinese architecture was not treated as cultural heritage in China until the mid-1980s, and that many of the records documenting those architects and buildings have disappeared in the course of China’s wars and social upheavals. In his reliance on textual materials, however, Cody has neglected some of the possibilities of the visual sources. His excellent analysis of the plans of Murphy’s banks for the International Bank Cooperation, which segregated Chinese clients and bank employees from Westerners, demonstrates the potential of this kind of approach, which he did not extend to the architect’s other works, particularly those in his Chinese mode. Consequently, Cody has not written about the stylistic development of Murphy’s work, although the illustrations demonstrate its importance.

Visual analysis could have helped answer the question Cody poses in his introduction—“what ‘tradition’ meant to Murphy” (3)—one that might lead to a postcolonialist discussion of how an architectural tradition was invented. Cody’s answer is that for Murphy, “Chinese architectural tradition encompassed three elements: the programmatic creation of space exemplified by the Ming-Qing palaces of the Forbidden City (ca. 1421–1894); the architectural form associated either with those palaces or with other Chinese building types such as pagodas; and the structural or ornamental nature of those forms such as bracketing, roof treatments and color schemes” (3). But the depth of Murphy’s understanding of Chinese architecture is striking when compared to that of other Western architects building in China during the period, such as the unknown practitioner who designed the St. Johns University campus in Shanghai in 1894; Fred Rowntree, who was responsible for the major buildings of the West China Union University in Chengdu in 1912; and A. G. Small of Perkins, Fellows & Hamilton, who did the same for Ginling University in Nanjing in 1919. What differentiated Murphy and made him more influential, I believe, is that he self-consciously drew on an official Chinese architectural language while others made reference to local traditions.

His approach can be seen as a codification effort that ultimately ruled out other interpretations of a “Chinese style.” Moreover, visual analysis reveals the compositional similarity between, on the one hand, Murphy’s Bashford Memorial Building of Yenching University and, on the other, the Civic Center of Greater Shanghai and the unexecuted project for the Foreign Ministry Office of the national government in Nanjing, designed by the Chinese architects Dong Dayou and Yang Tingbao, respectively. All three share a tripartite composition with a central pavilion topped by a gabled and hipped roof and flanked by two wings capped with hipped roofs. This comparison may provide a clue to the puzzle Cody presents toward the end of his study: “the few Chinese architects and builders still alive who recall Murphy remain convinced that he exerted considerable influence, and yet they too are hard pressed to say precisely how, or upon whom that influence was exerted” (217).

Gretchen Townsend Buggeln
Temples of Grace: The Material Transformation of Connecticut’s Churches, 1790–1840

Colonial Revival churches, which were popular in the first two decades of the twentieth century, stood as nostalgic icons of a simpler time. Their classical porticoes or porches, noble brick walls pierced by round-headed windows, and multistaged steeples conjured up thoughts of homogeneous communities gathered on Sunday mornings to share their faith in God and nation. In the words of one writer in 1944, this quintessential New England church type came to articulate a desire for “the original ideals of this country, inseparable from the old moral and spiritual standards of the Christian churches” (234), imagery employed to this day in greet-